

1 What is a collocation?

A What are collocations?

A collocation is a combination of two or more words which frequently occur together. If someone says, 'She's got *yellow hair*', they would probably be understood, but it is not what would ordinarily be said in English. We'd say, 'She's got **blond hair**'. In other words, *yellow* doesn't collocate with *hair* in everyday English. *Yellow* collocates with, say, *flowers* or *paint*.

Collocations are not just a matter of how adjectives combine with nouns. They can refer to any kind of typical word combination, for example verb + noun (e.g. **arouse someone's interest**, **lead a seminar**), adverb + adjective (e.g. **fundamentally different**), adverb + verb (e.g. **flatly contradict**), noun + noun (e.g. **a lick of paint**, **a team of experts**, **words of wisdom**). There is much more about different grammatical types of collocation in Unit 3.

Phrasal verbs (e.g. *come up with*, *run up*, *adhere to*) and compound nouns (e.g. *economy drive*, *stock market*) are sometimes described as types of collocations. In this book we consider them as individual lexical items and so usually include them here only in combination with something else, e.g. **come up with a suggestion**, **run up a bill**, **adhere to your principles**, **go on an economy drive**, **play the stock market**. However, it is not always easy to separate collocations and compounds and, where they are useful for learners as an important part of the vocabulary of a topic, we include some compounds in this book too.

It can be difficult for learners of English to know which words collocate, as natural collocations are not always logical or guessable. There is, for example, no obvious reason why we say **making friends** rather than *getting* friends or **heavy rain**, not *strong* rain.

Learners also need to know when specific collocations are appropriate. This is usually referred to by linguists as knowing which register to use. **Alight from a bus** is a formal collocation used in notices and other official contexts. In everyday situations we would, of course, always talk about **getting off a bus**. There is more about register and collocation in Unit 6.

B Why is it important to learn collocations?

An appreciation of collocation will help you to:

- use the words you know more accurately
 In other words, you'll **make** (NOT *do*) fewer **mistakes**.
- sound more natural when you speak and write
 By saying, for example, **of great importance**, rather than *of big or high importance*, you won't just be understood, you will – quite rightly – sound like a fluent user of English.
- vary your speech and, probably more importantly, your writing
 Instead of repeating everyday words like *very*, *good* or *nice*, you will be able to exploit a wider range of language. You would gain more marks in an exam, for instance, for writing *We had a blissfully happy holiday in a picturesque little village surrounded by spectacular mountains* than for *We had a very happy holiday in a nice little village surrounded by beautiful mountains*, even though both sentences are perfectly correct.
- understand when a skilful writer departs from normal patterns of collocation
 A journalist, poet, advertiser or other inventive user of language often creates an effect by not choosing the expected collocation. For example, a travel article about the Italian capital might be entitled *No place like Rome*, a reference to the popular expression **There's no place like home**.

Exercises

1.1 Match the two parts of these collocations.

1 adhere to	rain
2 arouse	different
3 blond	of wisdom
4 come up with	your principles
5 flatly	an economy drive
6 fundamentally	a seminar
7 go on	someone's interest
8 heavy	contradict
9 lead	hair
10 a lick	the stock market
11 play	of paint
12 words	a suggestion

1.2 Correct the underlined collocation errors with words from the advice in B. Be careful, you might find the words in the text, as well as in the examples.

- Exam candidates often make faults in their use of verbs like *do*, *make*, *go* and *get*.
- Try to use a longer range of language when you write.
- Exam candidates who use collocations well gather better marks.
- You have to know what normal collocation patterns are before you can lose them.
- The writer used colloquial language to form an effect.

1.3 Look at these sentences from a hotel brochure. Improve the style by replacing the words in italics with the word in brackets that forms the best collocation. (Use each word only once.)

- Our new family hotel is set in a *nice* location and all the rooms have *nice* furnishings and *nice* views over the surrounding countryside. (stylish / secluded / breathtaking)
- Visitors will enjoy the *good* atmosphere in either of our *good* dining rooms, both serving *good* food to both residents and non-residents. (delicious / relaxing / spacious)
- We organise tours to *beautiful* surrounding villages where you'll have the opportunity to take some *beautiful* photographs and sample the *beautiful* local cuisine. (mouth-watering / picturesque / stunning)

1.4 Write F (formal), I (informal) or N (neutral) in the brackets at the end of each sentence. In each pair of sentences, there is one neutral sentence and one formal or informal sentence. Underline the collocations that are noticeably formal or informal.

- Passengers must not alight from the bus while it is in motion. ()
 - Passengers must not get off the bus while it is moving. ()
- Let's grab a bite before we get down to work. ()
 - Let's have something to eat before we start work. ()
- SFTS has the right to bring the agreement to an end with three months' notice. ()
 - SFTS reserves the right to terminate the agreement with three months' notice. ()
- She thinks her boyfriend is planning to pop the question tonight. ()
 - She thinks her boyfriend is planning to ask her to marry him tonight. ()

1.5 Correct the four collocation errors in this paragraph.

The yellow-haired boy said he had joined the English class to get some new friends. He also said that he wanted to learn about collocations because it would be of big importance in helping him to do fewer mistakes when writing in English.

2 Strong, fixed and weak collocations

A Strong collocations

A strong collocation is one in which the words are very closely associated with each other. For example, the adjective **mitigating** almost always collocates with **circumstances** or **factors**; it rarely collocates with any other word. *Although she was found guilty, the jury felt there were **mitigating circumstances**.* [factors or circumstances that lessen the blame] Here are some other examples of strong collocations.

collocation	comment
Inclement weather was expected.	(very formal) = unpleasant weather <i>Inclement</i> collocates almost exclusively with <i>weather</i> .
She has auburn hair .	<i>Auburn</i> collocates only with words connected with hair (e.g. <i>curls</i> , <i>tresses</i> , <i>locks</i>).
I felt deliriously happy .	= extremely happy Strongly associated with <i>happy</i> . Not used with <i>glad</i> , <i>content</i> , <i>sad</i> , etc.
The chairperson adjourned the meeting .	= have a pause or rest during a meeting/trial <i>Adjourn</i> is very strongly associated with <i>meeting</i> and <i>trial</i> .

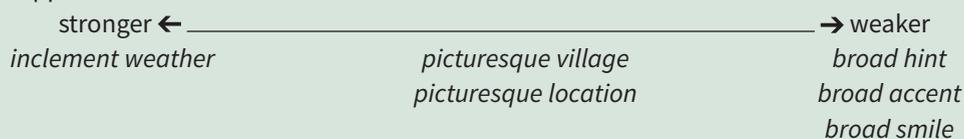
B Fixed collocations

Fixed collocations are collocations so strong that they cannot be changed in any way. For example, you can say *I was walking **to and fro*** (meaning I was walking in one direction and then in the opposite direction, a repeated number of times). No other words can replace *to* or *fro* or *and* in this collocation. It is completely fixed. The meaning of some fixed collocations cannot be guessed from the individual words. These collocations are called idioms and are focused on in the book *English Idioms in Use*.

C Weak collocations

Weak collocations are made up of words that collocate with a wide range of other words. For example, you can say you are **in broad agreement** with someone [generally in agreement with them]. However, *broad* can also be used with a number of other words – **a broad avenue**, **a broad smile**, **broad shoulders**, **a broad accent** [a strong accent], **a broad hint** [a strong hint] and so on. These are weak collocations, in the sense that *broad* collocates with **a broad range** of different nouns.

Strong collocations and weak collocations form a continuum, with stronger ones at one end and weaker ones at the other. Most collocations lie somewhere between the two. For example, the (formal) adjective *picturesque* collocates with *village*, *location* and *town*, and so appears near the middle of the continuum.



D Types of collocations in this book

The collocations in this book are all frequently used in modern English. We used a corpus (a database of language) to check this. We have also selected the collocations which will be useful to you as an advanced learner. We pay most attention to those that are not predictable. *A broad avenue*, for example, would be predicted by any student who knows *broad* and *avenue*. However, the use of *broad* to mean *strong* as in **a broad accent** is more difficult to predict.

Exercises

2.1 Complete the collocations using the words in the box. You will need to use some words more than once.

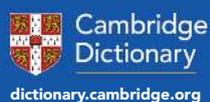
adjourn auburn broad deliriously inclement mitigating picturesque

- 1 a accent
- 2 in agreement
- 3 circumstances
- 4 factors
- 5 hair
- 6 happy
- 7 a smile
- 8 a location
- 9 a meeting
- 10 a town
- 11 a trial
- 12 weather

2.2 Rewrite each sentence using a collocation from 2.1.

- 1 Melissa has quite a strong Scottish accent.
- 2 Bad weather led to the cancellation of the President's garden party.
- 3 We were all very happy when we heard we'd won the award.
- 4 Their new home was in a very pretty location.
- 5 Because there were circumstances that made the theft less serious, the judge let him off with a warning.
- 6 I think we should stop the meeting now and continue it tomorrow.
- 7 She had a big smile on her face when she arrived.
- 8 She has lovely reddish-brown hair.
- 9 I think we're generally in agreement as to what should be done.

2.3 Think of as many collocations as you can for each word. Then look in a dictionary such as the Cambridge Online Dictionary for other suitable words. Write W (weak) or S (strong) next to each group depending on how many words you found.



- 1 extremely
- 2 an effort
- 3 cancel
- 4 deliver
- 5 a living
- 6 a meeting
- 7 feature
- 8 engage
- 9 bright

2.4 How useful do you think the collocations you have worked on in 2.2 and 2.3 are for you personally? Choose which collocations are most important to you and make sentences with them.

Over to you

Choose an English-language text that you have worked on recently. Underline five collocations in it. Are these collocations weak, strong or fixed?

3 Grammatical categories of collocation

A Verb + noun

verb	noun	example	meaning of verb
draw up	a list a contract	Our lawyer drew up a contract for us to sign.	prepare something, usually official, in writing
pass up	a chance an opportunity	I didn't want to pass up the chance of seeing Hong Kong, so I agreed to go on the trip.	fail to take advantage of
withstand	pressure the impact	The police officer's vest can withstand the impact of a bullet.	bear

B Noun + verb

noun	verb	example
opportunity	arise	An opportunity arose for me to work in China, so I went and spent a year there.
standards	slip	People feel educational standards slipped when the government cut finances.

C Noun + noun

- Noun + noun collocations used to describe groups or sets:
 There's been **a spate of attacks/thefts** in our area recently. [unusually large number happening in close succession]
 The minister had to put up with **a barrage of questions/insults** from the angry audience. [unusually large number, happening at the same time]
- Noun + noun collocations used with uncountable nouns:
 By **a stroke of luck** I found my keys in the rubbish bin! [sudden, unexpected piece of luck]
 She gave me **a snippet of information** which is top secret. [small piece of information]

D Adjective + noun

This is not an **idle threat**; I will call the police if this happens again! [simply a threat]
 He waited in the **vain hope** that the minister would meet him. [unlikely to be fulfilled hope]
 There is **mounting concern/criticism/fury** over the decision. [growing concern, etc.]
 The **simple/plain truth** is that no one was aware of the problem.

E Adverb + adjective

The article provides an **intensely personal** account of the writer's relationship with his sons.
 Joe's sister was a **stunningly attractive** woman.

F Verb + adverb or prepositional phrase

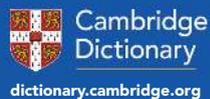
The teenager tried to persuade his mother that he was innocent but he **failed miserably**.
 I don't like to travel with my brother because he **drives recklessly**. [wildly, without care]
 As soon as the singer came on stage she **burst into song**.
 If your dog starts to **foam at the mouth**, you should take it to the vet immediately.

G More complex collocations

Mary was looking forward to retiring and **taking it easy for a while**.
 It's time you **put the past behind you** and started focusing on the future.

Exercises

3.1 Match a word from each box to form collocations. Not all the collocations appear on the opposite page, so use a dictionary such as the Cambridge Online Dictionary to help you if necessary.



dictionary.cambridge.org

disease evidence opportunity smoke
 standards teeth wind withstand

arises chatter howls pressure
 rises slip spreads suggests

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

3.2 Complete each sentence using a collocation from 3.1 in the appropriate form.

- 1 The scientific human beings first emerged in Africa.
- 2 The was all night and it was raining, so I couldn't sleep.
- 3 The machine has to be made of materials that can a lot of
- 4 Oh, no! There's a fire. Look at the from those buildings.
- 5 It was so cold I couldn't stop my from
- 6 Our survey shows that parents believe have at the school.
- 7 You must accompany Mason on one of his business trips to Asia, if the ever
- 8 An alarming new is among cattle in the south of the country.

3.3 Rewrite the underlined part of each sentence using a collocation from the opposite page.

- 1 I don't want to say no to the chance of meeting such a famous person.
- 2 We'll have to write a contract before you start work, as it's a new position.
- 3 You're working too hard. You should try to relax for a short period of time.
- 4 This new bullet-proof car can take the impact of a rocket-propelled grenade.
- 5 Do you have any interesting little bits of information about our new boss to tell us?
- 6 The minister faced a large number of questions from reporters.
- 7 I had some luck last week. The police found my stolen wallet and nothing was missing.
- 8 There's been a number of violent attacks in the area recently.
- 9 After her divorce Mandy was determined to forget the past and build a new life.

3.4 Answer these questions.

- 1 Who do you think is the most stunningly attractive person you have ever seen?
- 2 What should you do if you are in a car with someone who is driving recklessly?
- 3 Do you prefer walking in the country if there is a gentle breeze or a strong wind?
- 4 Would you write your most intensely personal thoughts and feelings in your diary?

3.5 Choose the correct collocation.

- 1 He said he would throw us out, but it was just a(n) *vain / idle / lazy* threat.
- 2 They rushed the victim to hospital, in the *idle / simple / vain* hope of saving her life.
- 3 The government is encountering *mounting / climbing / rising* criticism of its policies.
- 4 There is *raising / mounting / vain* concern across the world about climate change.
- 5 The horse was *fuming / foaming / fainting* at the mouth, so we called the vet.
- 6 Suddenly, without warning, Marta *busted / bustled / burst* into song.
- 7 The *right / straight / plain* truth is that I hate my job.
- 8 I tried to persuade her but I'm afraid I failed *desperately / miserably / wholeheartedly*.

4 Finding and working on collocations in texts

A Finding collocations

You can expand your collocation vocabulary by training yourself to notice collocations whenever you read. Note the collocations in these three examples of texts from different sources – a newspaper feature, a film review and a website for London tourists.

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

As a **newly qualified** teacher at a comprehensive school in Wiltshire, every day Joe **faces the challenge** of **gaining the respect** of a class of 15-year-olds. Joe, 26, admits it is a **tough challenge** but thinks he is **winning the battle**. Joe, who teaches English and media studies, and coaches a school football team, will **qualify fully** in July, **pending the results**¹ of his lesson assessments. With this **milestone passed**², and the increased financial stability it will bring, Joe will **turn his thoughts to** buying his first home.

¹ (formal) as long as he achieves successful results ² major life event behind him

The Interpreter
 ★ ★ ★ ★
 STARRING
 Nicole Kidman
 Sean Penn

She has a **gift for languages**, which brings her to the UN. She wants to **make a difference**. She is idealistic in that single-minded, dedicated manner associated with freedom fighters. Silvia (Nicole Kidman) remains an enigma. When Tobin Keller (Sean Penn) begins to investigate her, he is faced with a blank sheet. She is beautiful, blonde, lissom and lithe. She lives alone, has no lover, rides a Vespa throughout New York and works all day, **providing simultaneous translation** for delegates. She has an odd accent, which, like everything else about her, is **difficult to pin down**³.

³ hard to fix or place

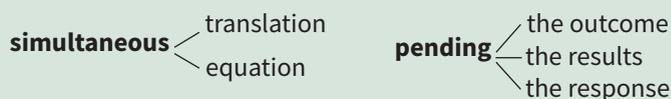


Covent Garden's buskers and jugglers **provide** no-cost **entertainment** in a car-free setting, and you've always **got the chance** of being plucked from the crowd to help out with a trick. Don't **underestimate the value of** London's public transport as a **source of fun**, either. The #11 double-decker from Victoria, for instance, will trundle you past the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and the Strand on its way to St Paul's Cathedral for a modest sum. The driverless Docklands Light Railway is another guaranteed **source of amusement** – **grab a seat** at the front of the train and pretend to be the driver, then **take a boat** back to the centre of town from Greenwich.

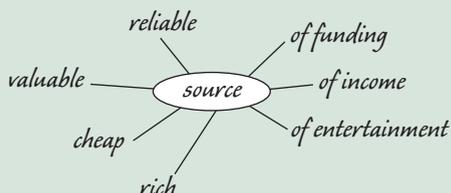
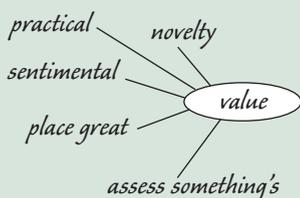
Remember you will also hear collocations in conversations, lectures, songs and films. Try to get into the habit of recording any interesting collocations that you notice.

B Recording collocations

When working on collocations in a text, use your dictionary to find more relating to one or both parts of the original collocation. You can record strong collocations in collocation forks:



and weak ones in collocation bubbles (because there are so many more of them):

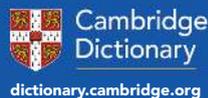


Exercises

4.1 Complete each sentence using a collocation from A.

- Tania has always had a so I'm not surprised she wants to study Chinese at university.
- At high tide the sea covers the causeway and the only way to get to the island is to
- It's very crowded in this café. You and I'll get our drinks.
- Once my exams are over I'll planning a holiday.
- Far more people these days manage to against cancer.
- Most politicians say they enter politics because they want to
- Try not to having good friends. Ultimately, friendship is far more important than work.
- He's got the job – a successful in his driving test tomorrow.
- Although they lack experience, doctors are often very enthusiastic and passionate about their work.

4.2 Complete the collocations. The first letters are given to help you. Use a dictionary such as the Cambridge Online Dictionary if necessary.



to j _ _ _ a _ t _ _
 to p _ _ _ u _ t _ _
 to g _ _ t _ _
 to s _ _ _ _ a _
 to b _ i _ w _ _ _ a

chance

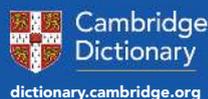
to f _ _ _ a _
 to p _ _ _ a _
 a d _ _ _ _ _
 to r _ _ _ t _ t _ _
 a s _ _ _ _ _

challenge

4.3 Check these expressions (a) in a good dictionary and (b) using a search engine. Which two are collocations and which two are not?

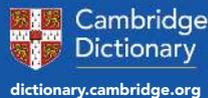
- 1 learn by head 2 learn by heart 3 lose a chance 4 miss a chance

4.4 Answer these questions.



- Name three milestones in your life that you have already passed.
- Are you already fully qualified? If so, as what? If not, when will you be?
- What are some typical sources of income?
- What is the toughest challenge you have ever faced?
- What qualities would be needed by someone providing simultaneous translation?
- What are some examples of things that have sentimental value for you?

4.5 Here is one student's plan for work on collocations. Complete the gaps, using a dictionary if necessary. Then tick the ideas you can use yourself.



- (1) an effort to notice collocations in any English text I read.
- (2) hold of a good dictionary to check other collocations for words that I want to learn.
- Write down at least three collocations for each new word I want to (3) to memory.
- Look back over old homework to see where I have (4) mistakes with collocations and (5) my best to (6) those mistakes in future.
- (7) a point of using good collocations when I have to write or speak in English.
- Read and listen to as much English as (8) because that will expose me to natural collocations.
- Every week revise the collocations I have (9) a note of in my vocabulary file.

5 Register

A What is register?

Our use of language changes according to the situation that we are in. If your close friend hosts a party, you could say, 'Thanks for the party. It was a blast.' (very informal) However, if your boss was the host, you would probably say, 'Thanks for the party. I really enjoyed it.' (neutral) In this example, *neutral* and *very informal* are both examples of register.

The register of most language is neutral (it can be used in any situation). However, register can also be formal, informal, characteristic of a certain professional field (e.g. legal, journalistic or media) or specific to official notices and forms.

Our choice of register depends on **what** we are talking about (business, the news, the neighbours), **who** we are talking to (friends, strangers, figures of authority) and **how** we are talking to them (in a letter, in an email, in public, in private). Study the table below and notice how different words and phrases are used to describe the same situation.

example	register	comment
The police are investigating / looking into the arms deal.	neutral	Either version would not seem out of place in any spoken or written contexts.
The cops are trying to dig out info about the arms deal.	informal	Phrasal verbs are often an informal alternative – although some are neutral.
The police are conducting an investigation into the arms deal.	formal	Longer words of Latin or Greek origin often indicate more formal language.
Police to probe arms deal	neutral, journalistic	<i>Probe</i> is typical of newspaper headline style.
The arms deal may be subject to police investigation .	formal, legal and official	<i>Subject to investigation</i> is typical of a bureaucratic or legal style.

Be careful not to think of formal language as written and informal language as spoken. There is a lot of overlap. For example, markedly formal language is most typical of official or academic writing and official legal or bureaucratic speech. Informal language is typical of conversation, personal letters and emails, messages on social media and some journalism.

B Formal versus neutral collocations

formal (from official documents)	neutral (spoken)
Students must submit their assignments by 1 May.	'You have to hand in your assignments by 1 May.'
Students may request an extension after consulting their tutor .	'You can ask for an extension after you've talked to / had a word with your tutor .'

C Informal versus neutral collocations

That film was **totally awesome!** (mainly used by teenagers, predominantly US) [neutral equivalent: absolutely amazing/fantastic]

That party was well good! (*Well* used to mean 'very'/'really', mainly by younger UK speakers.)

I **haven't a clue / the foggiest idea** what you mean. [neutral equivalent: I have no idea]

We can **grab a snack** before the meeting if you're hungry. [neutral equivalent: have a snack]

Tip

Make a note in your notebook if a collocation is very formal or informal in register.

Exercises

5.1 Write F (formal), I (informal) or N (neutral) in the brackets at the end of each sentence. Underline the collocations which indicate the register. Then rewrite the formal and informal sentences to make them neutral.

Example: Do not alight from the bus until it stops. (F) *Do not get off the bus until it stops.*

- I feel dead tired all the time. ()
- We were all bored stupid by the poetry reading. ()
- Currency exchange offices are located in the arrivals lounge. ()
- She conducted a study of single-parent family units. ()
- She did her degree in London and found work there in 2015. ()
- I just got the latest software so my computer is bang up to date. ()
- Affix a passport-size photograph to the application form. ()
- Jake asked his tutor for an extension to complete his dissertation. ()

5.2 Match the beginning of each sentence with its ending. Then label each sentence with the appropriate register from the list below. Underline the collocations which indicate the register.

Registers: informal conversation (IC) journalism/news (J) entertainment (E)
 technical (T) legal (L) notices (N)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 This is breaking | a ring after dinner. |
| 2 These are the songs that are climbing | according to model and road conditions. |
| 3 There are tons of good reasons | blockbuster from Star Studios. |
| 4 Visitors must keep to the designated | news here on Global TV Extra. |
| 5 In any such case, customers shall forfeit | electronic circuit. |
| 6 Fuel consumption may vary | of the fitness machines to 20 minutes. |
| 7 I'll give you | to win support for the plan. |
| 8 The minister will tour Asia in a bid | the charts this week. |
| 9 Joss Engold stars in the latest | for not studying law. |
| 10 A microchip is a miniaturised | testify for a second time. |
| 11 Please restrict your use | areas at all times. |
| 12 A witness may be asked to | the right to compensation. |

5.3 Complete this conversation between a doctor and a patient, using the verbs in the box in the appropriate form. The language is quite informal, without technical medical terms.

come	clear	do	feel	get	run	take	write
------	-------	----	------	-----	-----	------	-------

Doctor: What can I (1) for you, Mr Wilson?

Patient: Well, Doctor, I've been (2) a temperature for the last couple of days and I've (3) out in a rash on my neck. Do you see? These red spots here.

Doctor: Hmm. Let's (4) a look.

Patient: It's very irritating and I have trouble (5) off to sleep at night. Then I (6) down all day and can't concentrate on my work.

Doctor: Right. I don't think it's anything serious. I'll (7) you out a prescription for some lotion which should help to (8) up the rash.

5.4 Look at how the doctor describes the case in his records using more technical language. Choose the correct word from the choices provided. Use a dictionary to help if necessary.

A patient (1) *presented* / *represented* this morning with an (2) *elevating* / *elevated* temperature. He was also (3) *exposing* / *exhibiting* a neck rash. He further (4) *complained* / *grumbled* of an (5) *inability* / *impossibility* to concentrate.